# A Single Decision (Take Two)

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Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]
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Author's preliminary note: So, I made it eight chapters before vanishing for more than half a year. That's what happens when school reks you and then you get a (nearly) full-time job, on top of other distractions (muh chinese cartoons). I didn't entirely stop working, though. I've managed to finish several chapters over the last few months, and now I'm going to post them in at regular intervals until this arc of the story is completed. What did Timewatch mean by "arc?" An attentive reader will note that our two main POV characters, Grievous and Esera, have met for the first time in chapter eight. All secondary POV characters, like Kronaak, Tarkin, Organa, Gunray, and Obi-wan, have been introduced as well. We still have yet to meet some tertiary characters and "guest" characters, but that's for later. Anyways, chapter eight concluded the introductory arc of the story. Now, we move into the next one. So without further ado, let's get this show on the road. Again. Temporarily.

**Chapter Nine**

"This is incredible." Bail Organa said again, shaking his head. "Not only did the Chancellor die in that battle, but Dooku did too? Who leads the Separatists now?"

"It must be Grievous. It has to be." said Mon Mothma. The two were lurking just outside the Senate chamber, taking a quick break from the mind-numbing on-goings Mas Amedda was overseeing, for lack of any driving force in Palpatine's absence. "Who else would lead it?"

"Maybe one of their own senators. Representatives. Dignitaries. I'm not even sure what they call their government. Parliament?" Bail shrugged.

"Congress, I think."

"I can't imagine Grievous running a government. Not after all that we've heard about him." Bail took another look through the entrance to his pod; nothing important had come up inside the chamber, the senator of Humbarine was droning on about aid packages.

"I don't trust anything I hear on the news." Mon Mothma said, frowning at a camera droid that hovered into view. "Our media is subverted to the interests of the state."

"We serve the state, Senator Mothma." Bail reminded her.

"We strive to improve the state." spoke his counterpart, giving him a cool look. "We do not seek its empowerment for the sake of empowerment."

"Yes, yes." he sighed. "Just like Padme said: the bureaucracy expands to meet the needs of the expanding bureaucracy."

"You would do well to remember it, if you're going to stand for election to the Chancellorship."

"If I don't, I'll never hear the end of it from you and Padme... 'Chancellor Tarkin' also has a sinister ring to it, if you ask me." No, he didn't like the idea of Tarkin being elected at all. He barely knew the man, but from what he had seen of him during the Tano girl's trial, he didn't like him. That brought up another thought: "If Grievous is now leading the Separatists, do you think peace is even possible? He's a bloodthirsty madman, from what the Jedi say."

"That remains to be seen." Mon Mothma sighed. "Everything rests on our counterparts on Raxus being able to control him. Given how Dooku bypassed them so often... I have my doubts."

If Esera thought her day couldn't get any weirder, she thought wrong. Lirka, who had just met her not two hours before, dragged her down through the Congress building to the basement parking garage. Esera noticed she had the most absurdly long hair she'd ever seen on anyone, coming down in a long tail to her shins. She was tall, too, as tall as any clone trooper. *Everyone is taller than me,* Esera thought, though she was barely aware of it.

"Here it is, my very own speeder! It belonged to my last boss, but now we own it!" said Lirka.

It was more of a luxury skycar than anything else, huge and shiny and chrome. "I see." Esera said.

"Don't worry, I've got a droid pilot. Come on in!" Lirka didn't even wait before pulling her in by her jacket sleeve. The inside was just as spacious and glamorous as the outside, someone had paid good money for this thing. Most likely, Esera would have been awed before the war.

"Are we going far?" she asked.

"A dozen kilometers, about." said Lirka. "Sirka –that's my sister, by the way– and I have a house in the country. These human-built cities... They're not really our thing, no offense."

"I'm not a city person either." Esera sighed. "Oh, there's a droid on the ship I came with. Could we pick him up?"

"Of course!" said Lirka.

Lirka talked for almost the entire ride, short as it was in such a vehicle. As to what she was talking about, Esera wasn't sure, she stopped paying attention. They flew over snow-capped roofs, and then snow-covered fields, and then snow-dusted trees, before setting down. "Welcome to my home!" she said, pushing Esera out of the skycar. R8-M5 tumbled out after them, beeping in dismay. The Sephi's home was a lot more modest than what she was expecting. It was made of stone and timber, and was about the size of that hunting lodge she'd stayed in back on Shumavar.

"It's very nice." said Esera.

"Inside, inside!" Lirka commanded, already shivering in the winter air. In they went, leaving their shoes in the entry hall for some reason, before entering the rest of the house. Esera didn't know what the Sephi homeworld was like, but she assumed the interior of the house mimicked it. Woodwork was everywhere; synthetic material was entirely absent. The main hall had a hole cut in it, like a cave lined with bricks, and in it were small burning logs. Esera had never seen an indoor campfire before.

"Oh, hello." said the woman that could only be Sirka. She looked the same as Lirka; her face, her eyes, even her hair was worn the same. Exactly the same. If Esera had to guess, they just weren't sisters, they were twins. *No wonder some old politician hired them as "aides,"* Esera thought. Given Lirka's behavior, they probably had no real talents beyond looking pretty- But that was an awfully rude thing to think about the person who was welcoming her into her home. *Have some decency, Esera!* she scolded herself. A bad day was no excuse to be mean to others, especially for a Jedi. "Have you made another friend, Lirka?" asked Sirka.

"I have!" Lirka said, grinning. "This is Esera, from Subterrel, wasn't it?"

"Sure." said Esera.

"She's here with the delegate from that sector! We met at Congress today."

"Please to meet you." Sirka said, standing and giving her a slight bow. "I am Sirka, elder sister of Lirka."

"By ten seconds…" muttered Lirka. They were definitely twins, then. "Anyways, she's here because her delegation came by ship and have nowhere else to stay."

"All of them are here?" asked Sirka, looking concerned.

"Well, half." Lirka put her hand on Esera's shoulder. "It's a Polis Massan ship, so the lodgings aren't designed for humans. Representative Kruth is staying on the ship. I thought Esera would be more comfortable here. Sephi and Humans are pretty alike."

"That's a small team." remarked Sirka.

"Polis Massans have no experience in politics. Kruth was the only one of them who had ever gone more than two sectors from home." Esera explained.

"And Esera reads what he writes on the datapad." said Lirka.

"Sounds like a job better suited for a droid..." Sirka said. "But if you're staying with us, we'll be happy to have you. Guests are always a blessing!"

The two Sephis were quick to try to make her feel at home. They set her up in a spare room, which to Esera's relief had a bed much more suited to a human body. R8 even got a power-charging port. Then they had lunch; after three years of war, Esera had learned to eat whatever she was given and be grateful for it, too. Even if it was some strange-tasting vegetable soup

Both Lirka and Sirka were very curious about Subterrel. They seemed to have both decided that Esera was from the sector's name planet; unfortunately, Esera had never been there. She stumbled and stammered with her answers. How was she supposed to invent information about a planet she'd never seen when Grievous himself had almost killed her not three hours ago? Every time she thought about that, she was forced to relive the whole moment over again. What had happened? What made him change his mind? Why did he spare her? It just didn't make sense. The galaxy's most notorious killer, the tyrant of worlds, the warlord of the Separatist droid armies, the one who hated Jedi more than anything else, had let her go. *Why?* Why had she been given a second chance?

"...she does look troubled." Sirka was saying.

"See? She's been like that ever since General Grievous wanted to speak with her." Lirka said.

"Maybe she's one of his secret agents, and he had bad news for her?"

"Don't be silly, Lirka. She's way too young. No more than forty."

"Isn't forty middle aged for Humans?"

"I'm not sure... It's so hard to tell with them, they grow up so quickly."

"I'm seventeen, actually." Esera interrupted, breaking out of her own thoughts.

"Seventeen!?" scoffed Lirka. "I didn't even leave home until I was thirty!"

"I told you, Humans grow up fast compared to us." said Sirka. "Still, seventeen is a bit young to be out on your own, even for one of your own kind. Where are your parents? Do they know you're on Raxus, attending Congress?" Sirka smiled at the thought. "They must be very proud that you've risen so high in life already."

"Uh…" How was she going to explain this? "I haven't seen my parents in a while. They… they sent me to be an apprentice… of a miner."

"An apprenticeship in… mining?" Lirka looked skeptical. "Why'd you get sent to Raxus then?"

They had her now. "Um…"

"Maybe you're right about the secret agent thing." Sirka whispered to Lirka. "I don't think she's from Subterrel."

"What's a secret agent doing out on Polis Massa though?" Lirka wondered.

"It's a complicated story." Esera said.

"So you *are* a secret agent!" exclaimed Lirka.

"No! I'm just saying… How I got into the situation of assisting Representative Kruth is complicated."

The sisters were skeptical, but didn't press the issue further. *Great going, Esera, way to not look suspicious at all,* she thought. They had to be wondering what Grievous wanted with her, though. Luckily, Sirka changed the subject, and the chat went on. Esera retired to her room and tried to meditate, but once more, found the Force in turmoil. She was about to try and get some sleep when R8's lights came on, and beeped at her.

"What is it?" she asked. R8 beeped again, and then projected a hologram of Kruth. He held up that datapad, and showed her what he'd written. "A message from Polis Massa for me..." Esera read. And then the hologram flickered, and switched. She was met with the familiar figure of Ardabur Aspar.

"Hello again, Komara." Aspar said, smiling his false smile. "Somehow, I'm not surprised to find you on Raxus."

"What do you want?" sighed Esera, sitting down on the floor-level mattress she'd been provided with.

"I just thought I'd see how my treacherous counterpart was doing while I had the chance." he spoke.

"Well, I'm not butchering innocents, so I'd say I'm doing well." Esera said. Aspar rolled his eyes.

"There she goes again, about to launch into a lecture about how we have to follow the Jedi code, trying to be just like her master." He lost his smile, and gave her a bored look. "But like her master, she's too shortsighted and idealistic to realize the Jedi Order has failed because of its own stubborn refusal to let go of an outdated dogma."

They'd walked this path before. It was a debate spreading all through the younger ranks of the Jedi. They'd heard of Pong Krell and Bariss Offee, and others like them: Jedi who had lost faith in the way, who had fallen into darkness because it was the only path they saw left. Aspar was among those who thought the Jedi code was at fault for this. Esera thought the war was at fault for being at odds with the Jedi code.

"Nothing to say, hmm?" Aspar went on. "You never struck me as a confident person. You cling to the old ways because anything else scares you. I've sensed the fear in you, I've sensed the doubt, so don't pretend otherwise. And I can't entirely blame you, after what happened to your master-"

"That's enough!" snapped Esera.

"My, my, I've struck a nerve." said Aspar flatly. "I'll dispense with the taunts, then. We've already informed those idiots on the High Council you've run off to Raxus. As far as they and anyone else are concerned, you are a traitor to the Republic who needs to be tried and executed. And unlike the Tano incident, you've already admitted your guilt. Don't try coming back to tell your version of the story, they already know the truth."

Once again, Esera wished she had a witty response, something that would make Aspar look foolish, something that would save her the shame of sitting here dumbly. She gave it her best shot. "I really wonder how you convinced the High Council that bombing cities was a justified action."

"It wasn't me who informed them, it was Admiral Holt. He and I agreed that all they needed to know was that you interfered in operations against Separatist resistance in favor of the Separatists." Aspar said. "You're a traitor. I wish you weren't, but you are. It makes me sad, you might have been worth something with better influences. Maybe we'll meet again, Esera."

With that, Aspar's transmission ceased, and was momentarily replaced by the administrator from the asteroid base. "Hello again, Lady Jedi." he said.

"I take it you heard that whole conversation?" asked Esera.

"I did. Don't worry about us, your friend came alone and in secret. He didn't cause any trouble. But I'm afraid if we want it to remain that way, I'm going to have to request you don't return." said the Polis Massan. "We are sincerely thankful for helping Kruth get to Raxus, but we must preserve peace here. I'm sure you can understand."

Then the that transmission was cut too. "R8, can you contact the Jedi Temple through Kruth's ship?" Esera asked. R8 beeped, and hummed, before shaking back and forth as if to nod. Esera gave him her codes, but when she tried to open a line to the Temple, she found her access denied. Just as Aspar had said.

*They've written me off,* she thought. They'd abandoned her. They'd betrayed her. Just like Ahsoka Tano, the Council had turned their backs on her, without even bothering to hear her side of things. Esera's eyes watered, and she clenched her fists. *They're the traitors! Not me! I did what was right when no one else would!* And they cast her out! Now what was she going to do? Now where would she go? Those answers would not be easy to find. Esera breathed slowly, and tried to find peace again.

Later on, Lirka came in. "I just came by to-" She paused, smile dropping away. "Hey, you look pretty upset. Again. Are you alright?"

"I got banned from Polis Massa." said Esera. "And my home will not take me back."

"What? Why?" Lirka knelt down by the bed, looking outraged. "That's ridiculous! What did you do to deserve that?"

"It's complicated." That was the only answer she could give. Lirka frowned, and put her hand on her shoulder.

"Well, don't worry about it." said Lirka. "You can stay here as long as you need to. But in the meantime, it's dinner! We're going to watch the broadcast about today's Congress!" She bounced to her feet, and made for the door.

"Hey, Lirka?" Esera asked, before she left.

"Yes?" answered she.

"What makes you think you can trust me? You didn't even know me until this morning. You don't even know who I am or where I came from. I could be anyone, yet you invited me here."

"Call it intuition." Lirka answered, with a happy smile. "I doubt you're actually a miner from Subterrel, but whoever you really are, you seem like a decent person."

"I do try." said Esera, under her breath. If she didn't know better, she'd say she had made her first friend since the start of the war. And she was a Separatist at that. The Force did work in mysterious ways...

"This ought to be good." Rear Admiral Kronaak said to his comrade in planning, Rear Admiral Ricimer Eemon. They'd gathered with the other officers of the fleet at Triton to watch the daily broadcast of the Confederacy's biggest news outlet, Raxus Today.

"I still can't believe Dooku is dead." said Eemon.

"I'd already predicted the outcome a week ago-" Commodore Alzar Khwaramenes began to say.

"Sssh." hushed Vice Admiral Hithlu, the eternally shady Umbaran and acting commander of the fleet.

The two most famous anchors in the Confederacy appeared on the holoscreen. As always, they sat in front of a window that showed them a view of Raxus's capital, though it was night on that planet at the moment. "Hello," said the Muun, "I am Nal Verik."

"And I am Sarina Crena." said the woman, with a big smile. "Welcome to this evening's edition of Raxus Today."

"And what a day it's been." said Verik. "Early this morning, at the start of today's special session of Congress, General Grievous himself came to deliver news of Count Dooku's death, may he rest in peace. After that, he announced his request that the Congress recognize his authority as the new Head of State. To put it lightly, this was a matter of some controversy with the Congress."

"On that subject, we've arranged an exclusive interview with Representative Wayne Horthy of the Sujimis sector." Crena said, as the screen split in half to show a burly-looking Human man being attended by a medical droid. It looked like he'd been in a fight. "Good evening, Representative Horthy."

"Good evening." said Horthy, raising a hand like he meant to tip a hat that wasn't there. He settled on nodding instead.

"We've heard that you've had quite an interesting day." Verik said.

"Oh, it's been interesting, I'll tell you what." Horthy laughed. "We haven't had a session this full in six months! I think just about every sector that hasn't been conquered by the Republic sent someone here today. Hell, even some conquered sectors managed to get representatives out! Good on them, I say."

"I'll ask the question we're all wondering." spoke Crena, smiling slyly. "Is the Congress going to vote in General Grievous as the new Head of State, or not?"

"Well, that's a tough one to answer." Horthy put a hand on his chin. "We got a lotta folks here who think the time has come to negotiate with the Republic. They think the war is lost. They think the General will just prolong the inevitable, and make the coming defeat harder than it needs to be."

"And what do you think?" Crena asked.

"Me? I think we're gonna win! Put the General in power, I say, let him loose! We'll crush them all!" the man boasted. "The tree of liberty's gotta be littered with the blood of patriots! Chancellor Palpatine was not my Chancellor, he was a dictator and probably planning on ruling for life. The Senate is corrupt and we were taxed without representation. When my ancestors first settled Fallowan, they believed in a simple phrase: live free or die. Well, the time has come. We've joined the Confederacy to live free, or die trying!"

"No one can doubt your convictions, Representative Horthy." Verik said. "However, what do you have to say about your counterparts who desire peace?"

"Peace, huh? I bet Bremack's been on here talking about the power of non-violence or something crazy like that. I'd say-" The camera shook, and another human barged in onto Horthy's screen, one with a sharp, gaunt face, and close-cropped hair; he was wearing some kind of military uniform. "Arcus Cirrus, get out of here!" Horthy scolded. "This is my office!"

"No!" said Cirrus. "The media fears the truth, but I must speak! It is not with mercy and pacifism that the great debates of our time are settled, but with fire and blood! Do no rest until the Republic is destroyed! Kill the plutocrats, class war now!"

Horthy succeeded in pushing Cirrus away. "Sorry about that, you know how Cirrus and his lot can be."

"Yes, we've all heard of their heroic resistance against the Republic and its terrorist proxies." said Crena. "Though the views of the Jabiimi National Worker's Alliance are sometimes too extreme for the tastes of most of our audience."

"I agree with Representative Cirrus on one thing, for sure: this war must be prosecuted to the fullest extent in order to secure the future of this Confederacy. Only General Grievous can do this." said Horthy. The medical droid finished patching him up. "Obviously, some of my friends in Congress saw differently."

"Thank you for your time, Representative Horthy, the hopes of the nation are with you all." said Verik. The split screen vanished, and the focus returned to the two anchors. "General Grievous has long been a controversial figure in the Confederacy. No one knows who he really is, or where he came from. Indeed, he only made his public debut at the Battle of Hypori, six months after the war began." A grainy still image was shown, of a battle-worn Grievous caught in a spotlight; gun camera footage from a Republic gunship. A cyborg general that fought on the front lines and defeated even Jedi in hand-to-hand combat immediately caused a sensation in the Confederacy, Kronaak remembered. His fame had only grown since, until he became a household name as common as Dooku or Palpatine or Skywalker. "What

we do know is that General Grievous is a cunningly brutal, or perhaps a brutally cunning warrior. No other Confederate commander has a record that can match his. This is not necessarily a good thing, however. General Grievous is as infamous for his disregard of collateral damage as he is renowned for daring strategy. Republic sources even say he is the perpetrator of multiple massacres and enslavement operations, though they offer no proof, of course."

Kronaak's claws twitched. He didn't appreciate that accusation. Grievous might be harsh, vindictive, and spiteful, but he was no slaver! *Does the Republic have no shame?* he wondered briefly, before realizing that no, they did not have shame at all.

"At this point, no one knows what it would mean to have General Grievous take command of both the war and state functions." Crena took over for her partner, and the screen showed various stock clips of the rare times Grievous had ended up on camera over the course of the war. "No one thought the late Count Dooku would die before the war ended, so the constitutional clause that named the Supreme Commander as his successor in times of war was overlooked until now. General Grievous has never even been approached by our reporters, let alone given himself the chance to deny an interview, so we really have no idea what his true intentions are. As we heard earlier from Representative Dodra F'ass of the Mayagil sector, there are even fears that Grievous might turn the Confederacy into a military dictatorship..."

After that, Kronaak drifted into his own thoughts. He'd grown up under a military dictatorship on Siskeen, which had been overthrown by another military dictatorship, and then moved to Mintooine, where a military junta ruled, and then joined the Trade Federation fleet, a paramilitary force, and then found himself in the fledgling Confederate Navy, a true military force. Kronaak's entire life had been spent under the auspices of military authority. He wouldn't mind it if Grievous became a dictator. After all, as Eemon had told him the other day, a single strong leader could change history in a way that a rabble of lesser men could never hope to match. If Grievous did seize power, the Navy would surely side with him, as would the Army. The civilians would only be able to grumble. Kronaak wondered how easy a coup against those fools on Raxus would be...

"A dictator?" Grievous laughed at the news broadcast he'd been listening to. "I like it!"

"Oh no, they've given him an idea..." A-4D sighed, as he cleaned Grievous's cloak of dust.

"I would be able to fight this war as I wished, at last!" Yes, he liked that notion a lot! "I will consult my commanders, perhaps they might make a better government than this lot."

"Master, would that really be wise?" the droid asked. "Your commanders need to focus on the war, not politics, I would think. But what do I know? I'm just a doctor."

"Hmm... Yes, there is that too. We will see how tomorrow goes." Grievous wondered how easy it would be to take over the Congress building before the politicians made their choice.

The lights were going out in the Congress chamber. Night had fallen long ago, and the clouds had been swept away by what only could have been a stiff wind, showing the stars above. If Corlissi Ludar squinted hard enough, he could see points of light moving above. Not stars, but ships from the fleet in orbit.

"Sixteen hours to reach a decision." Tyrecka Bremack yawned.

"Back on Coruscant, it would have taken sixteen weeks. If not that many months." said Ludar. "We Sluissi are a patient people, but even I have my limits."

"Don't remind me." Bremack groaned. "I have to admit though, I've come to like these face-to-face confrontations. It's so much more personal than pods."

"It will always be a wonder how an advocate for peace likes confrontation." Ludar said, as they exited the chamber.

"And I will always wonder how an advocate for war dislikes it." sighed Bremack.

"Without a decisive victory, the Republic will never recognize us." he said. "It's that simple."

"You overestimate their resolve. We both know what kinds of people we're up against on Coruscant. And we're both here because we hate them."

"Yes, that is so." Ludar agreed. "Do you think Grievous can do it?"

"He's our only hope." Bremack said, frowning. "Who would have ever thought we'd say that about Grievous?"

"Certainly not I." As they left the building for a bit of sleep, Ludar spotted some workers still moving about. "Didn't your shift end hours ago?" he asked the Gossams. They looked at him, but said nothing. Well, it wasn't his problem.

Author's concluding note: I noticed the dividing lines between POV switches were missing last chapter. Didn't realize it until a while after my "disappearance" though, and I didn't want to give anyone false hope by taking it down and reposting it with only some lines added. I use three asterisks to divide them in my documents, apparently the doc manager here eats those whole for some reason.

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